

4. NEGRO SLAVERY.

No. VI.

PREDISPOSING CAUSES TO INSURRECTION IN DEMERARA.

IN the year 1816, during the controversy occasioned by the Registry Bill, several little tracts were published, under the title of "West-Indian Sketches," intended to illustrate the state of feeling, with respect to the Slaves, which prevailed in West-Indian society. In the first of these, an account was given, from Dr. Pinckard, of an insurrection of the Slaves, which took place in Demerara, in 1796; on which occasion, we are told by this intelligent writer, that, "as an encouragement to the able and new raised troops" (formed partly of Negroes, partly of Indians) employed to suppress the insurrection, "a premium was offered for every right hand of a Bush" (or revolted) "Negro that should be brought in; and when they returned from the woods, they appeared with seventy black arms displayed upon the points of their bayonets, causing a very singular and shocking spectacle to the beholders. Three hundred guilders each had been paid as the price; but it was found necessary to reduce the premium, lest the Slaves should kill the prisoners, or even destroy each other to obtain it."

Such of the revolted Slaves as were taken, he tells us, were tortured to make them betray their associates; but, faithful to their cause, they suffered torture, and death itself, without betraying them.

"The cruel severities inflicted upon these miserable Blacks," he goes on to say, "have been such as you will scarcely believe could have been practised by any well-ordered government: for, however strongly punishment was merited, the refinement of torture with which it was employed ought never to have been tolerated in any state professing to be civilized. Humanity shudders at the bare recital of it."

"Most of the ringleaders were taken, and brought to Stabroek, where they were afterwards tried and executed; the majority of them suffering with a degree of fortitude and heroism worthy a better cause. One in particular, named Amsterdam, supported the extreme of punishment with a firmness truly astonishing. He was subjected to the most shocking torture, in the hope of compelling him to give information regarding the remain-

ing encampment—but in vain! He despised the severest suffering, and nothing could induce him to betray his late companions, or to make known their yet undiscovered retreat*.

"He was sentenced to be burnt alive, first having his flesh torn from his limbs with red-hot pincers; and in order to render his punishment still more terrible, he was compelled to sit by, and see thirteen others broken upon the wheel and hung; and then, in being conducted to execution, was made to walk over the thirteen dead bodies of his comrades. Being fastened to an iron stake, surrounded with the consuming pile, which was about to be illumined, he regarded the bystanders with all the complacency of heroic fortitude, and, exhibiting the most unyielding courage, resolved that all the torture ingenuity or cruelty might invent, should not extort from him a single groan, or a syllable that could in any way impeach his friends.

"With the first pair of pincers, the executioner tore the flesh from one of his arms. The sudden infliction of pain caused him to recede, in a slight degree, from the irons; and he drew in his breath, as if to form it into a sigh, but he instantly recovered himself. His countenance indicated self-reproach, and he manifestly took shame for having betrayed even the slightest sense of suffering; then, resuming more, if possible, than his former composure, he patiently waited the approach of the next irons; and, on these being brought towards him, he stedfastly cast his eye upon them, inclined a little forward, and with an unshaken firmness of countenance deliberately met their burning grasp! From that moment he shewed himself capable of despising the severest pain. Not a feature was afterwards disturbed, and he preserved a degree of tranquillity implying absolute contempt of torture and of death.

* Such readers as have not nerves capable of enduring a tale of horror, will do well to proceed no farther in the narration.

"Finally, when the destructive pile was set in flames, his body spun round the iron stake, with the mouth open, until his head fell back, and life was extinguished. I am told, by a gentleman who had the melancholy task to attend the execution, that the most horrid stench continued for many hours to issue from the roasting body, and was extremely offensive throughout the town, penetrating so strongly into the houses to leeward, as to make many persons sick, and prevent them from taking food during the remainder of the day."

Several other facts were drawn from the interesting narrative of Dr. Pinckard, to shew both the perversion of law and justice which was apt to take place in Demerara, whenever a matter between a Black man and a White man came to be decided by the magistrate, and the cruelties to which the Slaves were exposed from the unrestrained exercise of the power of the owner or his delegate, cruelties in the infliction of which, according to Dr. Pinckard, even the ladies of Demerara did not scruple to participate.

Soon after the "West-Indian Sketches" began to make their appearance, a similar set of tracts was set on foot, by the colonial party, entitled "Antidote to West-Indian Sketches." The first of these expresses the strongest indignation at the monstrous injustice of deducing any inference, to the general disadvantage of West-Indian society, from what might have occurred at Demerara. It rejects with scorn and resentment the very idea of any analogy between the mildness and humanity of English bondage, and the opprobrious harshness of that state in the Dutch colonies: and, after noticing, in the usual style, the "defiance of truth," "the unparalleled effrontery," "the wilful falsehood and calumny," "the fa-

naticism and prejudice," by which "a small party" was preparing for "the rapid march of murder, anarchy, and desolation in our West-Indian possessions," it proceeds thus.—

"Having described the shocking punishment that was inflicted on the Bush Negroes, the editor of the West-Indian Sketches says, 'The object of the present paper is to give one of those *graphic* representations of West-Indian manners and feelings, in respect to the Slave population, which Dr. Pinckard's work has furnished. Well may humanity shudder at such a recital. But if the transaction be too horrid even to be told, what must it have been to be witnessed, and still more to be felt? And is it in the *uncontrolled* power of persons, capable of perpetrating such atrocities, that the British Parliament and Nation will be content to leave the destinies of so many of their fellow-subjects? We must no longer squeamishly turn aside our view from these spectacles of horror. This nation can no longer decline the duty of examining them, aye, and of remedying them too.'"

The comment of the organ of the West-Indian party (the "Antidote"), on the above passage, is to the following effect:—

"Only mark with what insidious and wilful obliquity the 'Sketch' applies this scene (*which was acted twenty years ago in a DUTCH colony, under DUTCH laws and government, and by persons totally unacquainted with our language,*) to the present existing state of society and feeling in our ENGLISH colonies. So that the sins of the Dutch in Demerara, are to be visited on the heads of Englishmen, who are eminently humane, both individually and as a nation! As well might all the horrors of the French Revolution be brought up in judgment against the present generation in England, as the cruelties of the Dutch planters of 1796 be a subject of reproach to the English of 1816."

The writer then proceeds to "inquire into the justice of identifying the feelings and acts of Dutchmen with those of our own countrymen. Hear, in the first place," he says, "what Mr. Brougham says of the Dutch, in his Colonial Policy, vol. i. p. 75: 'The Dutch, on the other hand, who grovel after every kind of profit, whose spirit for gain is tempered by no dignity of character, and prompted by the competition of large capitals, are of all nations in the West Indies the most inhuman masters, and the most pliable in worming themselves into the various habits of gainful speculation.' And again, p. 361; 'The most unfortunate circumstance in the colonial policy of the Dutch has always been, *their bad treatment of the Slaves.*'"

In another place, the same writer represents the editor of the "Sketches" as vilifying "the British West-Indian community, by falsely applying to them the acts and feelings of foreign colonies; of those foreigners too whom Mr. Brougham and Dr. Pinckard represent as *infinitely less humane and indulgent to their Slaves than any other nation of Europe.*"

The object of quoting these statements of the West-Indian body, is not to controvert the allegations of unfairness in the reference made to Demerara, though that were easy, and was in fact done at the time; but to shew that, even in the general estimation of that body, the rigour of Negro Slavery in Demerara was so great, when compared with that state in the British colonies, as to warrant their loud and vehement indignation, at its being supposed possible that the feelings and acts of the Demerara planters could form any just illustration of their own.

We have therefore the important sanction of the West-Indian body in this country, by whom the work from which these extracts have been made was printed and circulated, and that at the recent period of

1816, to the statement of Mr. Brougham, which they quote as unquestionable, that the Dutch "are, of all nations in the West Indies, the most inhuman masters."

It will, without doubt, be alleged, that the frame of society in Demerara has been much changed of late, and that a larger intermixture of English with the Dutch planters has tended greatly to ameliorate the condition of the Slaves. Doubtless there may have been a considerable change in this respect: but then it is to be remarked, that the laws and institutions are still *Dutch*; and that, although the numbers of English proprietors may have been increased, yet that these are, for the most part, non-resident, while a very large proportion of the overseers, and *petits blancs*, are still Dutch. But, even if this were not so, there are certain habits and feelings, and modes of thinking and acting, which become the inheritance of a community, and which it is not easy to eradicate even by great and sudden changes, and still less by that occasional and gradual accession or removal of individuals by which the constituent parts of the White society in Demerara have changed their proportions. Persons thus joining themselves, from time to time, to a community already formed, are powerfully and almost irresistibly operated upon by the prevailing habits of that community into which they merge, and to which they become almost insensibly assimilated. So that, even at this moment, the manners and feelings of the generality of the Whites in Demerara will be found, and more especially in all that relates to the discipline of plantations, as essentially *Dutch* as are their laws. The English language has obtained a greater currency; but the spirit and tendency of the colonial institutions have undergone no substantial alteration. What change, for example, has been made in the legal

condition of the Slaves at Demerara, since it was annexed in 1814 to the British crown? We know of none. It wears now the same harsh and severe aspect which West-Indians themselves only a very few years ago contended that it wore, as compared with the English colonies*.

A still more palpable proof of the peculiar rigour of slavery in Demerara, is to be found in the great waste of human life which even now takes place there. A most incorrect statement, proceeding on very partial premises, has lately appeared from the pen of the Registrar of that colony, in which he labours to deliver the administration of the slave system in Demerara from the irresistible conclusion to which the great mortality among the Slaves would conduct us. He conveniently chooses to found his reasonings on a part only, and not on the whole, of the returns; for which he surely might have waited, had he not been eager for the opportunity of producing such an impression on the public mind as suited his purpose.

Having no accurate census of the population of the colony during the last three years, it is necessary to go back to the preceding census, which was taken in 1820. The number of Slaves returned for registration in 1817, was 79,197: the number returned in 1820, was 77,376, exhibiting a decrease of 1821. From this decrease, however, we ought in fairness to deduct the manumissions which took place in that time, amounting to 127, and the Slaves exported from the colony, amounting to 59. The decrease is thus diminished to 1635. But to this number must be added, on the other hand, the Slaves imported into the colony during the same period, amounting to 3746; making the real decrease to be no less than 5381, or nearly 7 per cent.

The Registrar of Demerara will find it difficult, with all his inge-

* See, for a delineation of it, "Negro Slavery, No. I."

nuity, to get rid of this stubborn fact, which proves that the slavery of that colony is peculiarly hostile to the health and life, and therefore to the comfort and happiness, of its subjects.

But, independently of this general reasoning, which seems to establish the peculiar harshness of the Demerara system of bondage, there are some further circumstances connected with that system which have given a more than ordinary aggravation to its evils. These we shall now specify.

1. The Slaves are, for the most part, either native Africans, brought thither by the slave-trader, or Creole Slaves, who have been transported from the islands in which they were born or long settled, and torn from many of their beloved connexions there, victims of that inter-colonial slave-trade which has too long been suffered to subsist. It cannot be doubted that these persons will, in general, be inclined to feel discontent with their new situation, and resentment for the cruel exile to which, without a crime, they have been condemned. They have been removed from such places as the Bahamas, where the labour was light, the soil dry, and the climate salubrious, and where population, from the comparative mildness of the system, was rapidly progressive, to a colony where the labour is peculiarly onerous, the soil swampy, the climate most unhealthy, and where, owing to these circumstances, and the comparative harshness of its slave code, the mortality is excessive*.

2. The planters of Demerara have, in general, shewn themselves preeminently hostile to the religious instruction of their Slaves. To prove this, it would be only necessary to read the colonial journals, which have been filled from time to time with the most violent abuse of those who made the attempt to in-

struct them. At one time the Government was obliged to interfere in favour of the Missionaries; and the recent treatment which they have received (of which more hereafter), is a decisive proof that the hostility to their efforts subsists without abatement.

3. A third point to be noticed is, that Demerara is now among the few British colonies which have not repealed their cruel and despotic laws, restraining the masters' power of voluntary manumission. Taxes continue to be imposed on acts of enfranchisement, by the mere authority of the Governor and Court of Policy, to an enormous extent. It appears from recent returns to Parliament, that even 1000, and 1100 guilders have been charged for a single manumission, and 3000 guilders for the manumission of a mother and two children. And the Governor, in his official letter accompanying the returns, appears to approve of these cruel restraints on a species of beneficence which a humane and wise legislation would most anxiously encourage. Many a Slave doubtless finds this tax to be the only obstacle to his freedom, and cannot but feel disaffection towards a government which thus stands between him and the bounty of his master.

4. The constituted guardians of the slave population of Demerara, are the Governor and the two Fiscals. It is to them that the law commits the delicate and important task of interfering between the master and the slave, and of protecting the latter from the harshness or violence of the former. But will it be believed that these important functionaries are themselves large slave-owners? The very men to whose sympathies the comfort and happiness of the slave population in this extensive colony are entrusted, are rendered liable by this circumstance to have their sympathies

* The very fertility of the soil in Demerara tends to aggravate the misery of the Slave. The labour extracted from him turns to better account than in the other colonies, and is therefore more unsparingly required.

engaged against the Slaves. Their feelings and interests will be apt to be in unison rather with those of the masters than of the slaves whom it is their office to protect. This is remarkably exemplified in the case of a late fiscal of this same colony.

In November 1815, this gentleman, then acting as the fiscal or criminal judge of the colony, took it upon him to publish, in the Gazette of Demerara, a letter, containing, among many other things equally objectionable, the following sentiments: "I will venture to state it as my humble opinion, that the authority of the master over his Negroes, being constantly employed in minute details, and being in its nature prompt and of hourly application, *is not to be encumbered with official formalities.* The sudden exercise of it is indispensably necessary to keep them to obedience and their duty." "It is a power to be exercised by the proprietor as *sole chief and magistrate.*" "It would become entirely impracticable to check and restrain the disorders which would ripen into serious evils, if the masters were not armed with a powerful coercive force *suddenly to apply the remedy.* His power cannot without danger be brought into doubt or discussion: it should never be opposed or thwarted by any intermediate authority." This Fiscal goes on to deprecate, in the strongest terms, the interference of public functionaries between master and slave, and intimates that the *honour* of the planters is a sufficient security for the well-being of the Slaves.

And who is it that thus writes?

The fiscal, the criminal judge of the colony; the very man to whom the protection of the Slaves from domestic oppression is officially committed by his Majesty. But if the criminal judge himself, the official guardian of the Slaves, ventures, openly and in the hearing of the community at large, thus to express his sentiments, what may we reasonably expect to be the views and feelings of the mass of those whom

he addresses? And would it be surprising if the Slaves of Demerara, thus avowedly abandoned, by their legal protector, to those who could tolerate the scenes described by Dr. Pinckard, should be goaded to insubordination and revolt?

Whether this Fiscal was himself a planter, we know not: we believe he was. But if he was not, he had obviously still less temptation than he would have had in that case, thus to abandon the proper objects of his appointment. But, whatever he was, we know that the present Fiscals, as well as the Governor, are planters, the proprietors of scores or hundreds of Slaves, whom they may possibly be led to overwork or unduly to punish. What an additional motive must they in this case be apt to feel, in favour of the master and against the complaining slave? The Governor and the two Fiscals—the very individuals, we repeat it, on whose sympathy depend the happiness and comfort of the whole slave-population in that colony—are at this moment, and have been for some time past, considerable holders of Slaves.

Now, without pretending to say that this circumstance has actually been productive of disastrous consequences to the Slaves, every man who is acquainted with human nature would be prepared to expect that it *might* exercise an injurious influence on their condition. It has been no unfrequent occurrence of late years in Demerara that gangs of Negroes have thought it necessary to repair to the Fiscal to complain of the exactions or privations they were enduring from their owners or managers. To such complaints it is most unquestionably the duty of the Fiscal to lend a patient and willing ear. He should be ready at least to sooth the irritation and discontent, arising even from imagined wrongs, instead of aggravating them by a stern and repulsive reception. In many cases, however, this course, we are assured, has not been pursued. The complaints have

frequently been pronounced to be unfounded, and the conduct of the complainants has been condemned as contumacious. Redress has been refused; the persons deemed the ringleaders have been severely cart-whipped by an order of the judge; and the whole have been sent back, as offenders, to abide the pleasure of their exasperated superintendant. Even if a patient investigation should have shewn their complaints to have been unfounded, such a procedure as this would be altogether unjustifiable. To persons so completely subjected to the arbitrary power of their owners, or managers, the door, instead of being thus barred against them, should be widely opened by the constituted authorities to the communication of their grievances. Such a course affords to the Slaves their only hope of defence from the abuse of the tremendous power in question; and if that hope be cut off, what remains for them but bitter heart-gnawings, and desperate resolutions of vengeance? We have even been assured that the gangs of some of the very estates which have been implicated in the recent disturbances, are of the number of those who, during the last three years, have thus complained and have thus been dealt with.

These facts are stated on what we deem to be adequate authority. But as the point is of no small importance, we trust that Government will, without delay, call for the records of the proceedings of the Colonial Fiscals, in their capacity of guardians and protectors of the

Slaves, for the last ten years, in order that it may be seen what have been during that time the mutual complaints of masters and slaves, and how those complaints have been redressed or punished.

Now, if the above be a faithful representation of the harsh peculiarities of the Demerara system of bondage, shall we affect surprise, as if some strange occurrence had taken place, at hearing of insubordination, or even of insurrection, among the Slaves? The surprise rather is, that human endurance should be capable of sustaining such a state without convulsive efforts of a far more disastrous and sanguinary character than any which have yet occurred. And when tumult and disorder, and especially when petty plantation brawls take place, we are surely not driven, after all that is stated above, to explore the causes of them in the speeches and pamphlets of Abolitionists, or in the incendiary discourses of Missionaries. Indeed, it ought to be known, that insurrections, so called, and alarms of insurrection have been frequent in Demerara, although it has not always suited the views of the colonists either to shed so much Negro blood, in order to quell them, or to excite so loud a clamour in England respecting them, as they have done on the present occasion. But the field of observation which this remark opens is too wide to be now entered upon. The subject will be resumed in our next paper.

Finding sufficient room for the purpose, we insert in this place a transcript, *verbatim et literatim*, of the list of Run-aways in Kingston Workhouse on the 30th of January 1823, as it stands in the Extra Postscript to the Royal Gazette of Jamaica from January 25th to February 1st, 1823.

John, a Munding, 5 feet 4½ inches, marked I G on the left shoulder, mark on the right shoulder blotched, has country marks down the cheeks, lost many of the upper and lower teeth, has a scar on the snail of the left leg, had

on an iron rivetted collar when committed, to a Mr. Rieussett, who he says keeps a shop at Annotto-Bay Oct. 30 Robert, a likely young Creole Negro boy, 4 feet 11 inches, no brand-mark, has a scar near the wrist of the right

hand, on the right cheek, and on the chin, to Miss Jenny Brown, at Haughton-Court estate, Hanover Oct. 30

Thomas Brown, a smart young Creole Negro man, 5 feet 7½ inches, marked apparently A E on the left shoulder, and the mark on the left shoulder blotched, has small whiskers, and hairy about the breasts, acknowledges that he was condemned for life to the St. James's Workhouse, from whence he made his escape about three weeks ago Nov. 1

Brocknan, a Moco, elderly, 5 feet 2½ inches, marked P I O on the right breast, lost the first joint of the little finger of the left hand, and has lost some of his teeth, to Messrs. Adams, Robertson, and Co. 4

Thomas James, *alias* John Crooks, a dark Mulatto Creole man, 5 feet 9½ inchs, marked R. C. on the left shoulder, with a scar on the left of the shoulder, has large whiskers, and very hairy about the stomach and breasts, has scars on his shins, the first joint of the finger next the thumb of the left hand injured, and crooked; he was taken out of this Workhouse on the 29th April last, by Messrs. Hale and Woodgate, as the property of John Pratt, Esq., Montego-Pay; he now says that he is free, and is committed by the Sitting Magistrates until he produces some document thereof 17

George, a Mungola, 5 feet 5½ inches, marked apparently D S, B on top, on shoulders, some of his upper teeth are decayed, and has scattered whiskers, to Blenheim estate, Hanover

Archy, or Archy Brown, *alias* Ned, says that he is a native of Boston, in the United States of America, a coal-black Negro man, 5 feet 8½ inches, a blacksmith by trade, marked M on the left shoulder, and M, with T C over it, on the right shoulder, his shins are scarred, has small whiskers, lost some of his upper teeth, and his teeth are otherwise decayed, supposed to belong to Retirement estate, St. James's, where he has been seen working at his trade in a blacksmith's shop on the estate, many years ago, and that he was then called Ned, but he says that he was left free by the late Captain Morgan, who was the son-in-law of his late mistress, Mrs. Mary Malcolm, dec. of Black River; and that when he was seen working in the shop on Retirement estate, it was while he was waiting on Mr. William Morgan, the

brother of the Captain, who was staying there for the benefit of his health; and that he did not belong to the estate; committed until chained, or he proves his freedom Nov. 26

Jane, a young Creole Negro woman, 4 feet 11 inches, marked A S on the left shoulder, eruption all over her, to Miss Marianne King, a Person of Colour Manchester Dec. 17

William, a Mungola, 5 feet 3½ inches, marked I M, heart on top, on left, and apparently H B, in one, on right shoulder, and many of her teeth are lost; says that he formerly belonged to Mr. C. P. Berry, a mason, who sold him to a Mr. Morgan, near Bog Walk, in St. Thomas in the Vale, to whom he now belongs 1823, Jan. 2

William, a smart likely Creole Negro man boy, 5 feet 1 inch, no brand-mark, to Mr. Taws, or to Mr. Edward French, a carpenter in Spanish Town 15

Valentine, a young Creole Negro boy, 4 feet 10 inches, marked B on shoulders, and has remarkable scars all over his body and down his legs, to Mr. Jas. Betty, overseer on Crescent Park pen, St. Ann's

John Jones, a young Creole Negro man, 5 feet 4½ inches, marked CE (blotched) on left shoulder, and IF on breasts, to Maurice Jones, Esq., Hartford estate, Manchioneal 20

Sam, a young Creole Negro man, 5 feet 5½ inches, marked IM on shoulders, and T P below on left shoulder, has marks of flogging on his back, to the estate of the late Mr. Thomas Pickersgill, St. Mary's; he says that Mr. Hyslop, of Nutfield estate, in the same parish, is his trustee 22

Bob Williams, an elderly Creole Sambo man, 5 feet 3½ inches, of a sickly appearance, marked S R on right shoulder, has a scar on the left cheek, and the whole of his teeth are lost, to Samuel Riley, Esq., Riley's estate, Hanover 24

Dorothy, a likely young Creole Negro woman, 5 feet, no brand-mark, her lower front teeth are open, and has a scar across the upper part of her nose, to Miss Hart, Hart's Hall plantation, St. Elizabeth's; says Mr. Daly is her trustee 25

Ahba, a young Creole Negro girl, 4 feet 8 inches, no brand-mark, has a remarkable mark just below her knee-pans, to Miss Duneomb, a Person of Colour, near Solas' 29